

The Architecture of Al Hambra

(al-Qal'at al-Hamrā' = "the red fortress")

الْحَمْرَاءُ الْقَلْعَةُ

*From me you are welcomed morning and evening
by the tongues of blessing, prosperity, happiness and friendship"
"has decorated me with the robes of his glory and excellence
without disguise and has made me the throne of his empire
may its eminence be upheld by the master of divine glory and the celestial throne"*

Inscription on the walls



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ABSTRACT

The Alhambra complex in Granada, Spain is the most renowned building of the Islamic historical legacy and an enduring testimony to Islamic architecture on the European continent. Apart from that it is the only medieval palace in the world (not just Islamic) which has arrived intact to the present day. This paper examines the history and architectural morphology of this creation. And its place in what is known as ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE. What is surprising is the dearth of literature about this renowned place in the on-line world.

Introduction: The Al Hambra or al-Qal'at al-Hamrā' - "the red fortress" an Arab citadel and palace situated in the Andalusian region of the State of Granada, Spain, is the most renowned building of the Islamic historical legacy-the astonishing achievements of Muslim scholars, scientists, craftsmen, and traders during the few hundred years or so that are called the Golden Age during 750 to 950 AD when the territory of the Muslim Empire encompassed present-day Iran, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, North Africa, Spain, and parts of Turkey and drew to Baghdad; producing unparalleled intellectual traditions. Apart from that it is the only medieval palace in the world (not just Islamic) which has arrived intact to the present day.

The beginning of Islamic conquests of what is known as Spain or Hispania(in those days) began on April 30, 711, Muslim General Tariq ibn-Ziyad landed at Gibraltar and by the end of the campaign most of the Iberian Peninsula were brought under Islamic rule.

The importance of this region stems from the fact that many Andalusians participated in the expedition of Christopher Columbus on 3 August 1492 that ended up in the Europeans learning of the existence of the Americas which ended the Middle Ages and signalled the beginning of modernity. Contacts between Spain and the Americas, including royal administration and the shipping trade of Spanish colonies for over three hundred years, came almost exclusively through Andalusia. This conquestorial period lasted till the 10 year Granada war between 1482 and 1491, during the reign of the Catholic Christian monarchs Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, against the Islamic Nasrid dynasty's Emirate of Granada. It ended with the defeat of Granada and its annexation by Castile, ending all Islamic rule on the Iberian peninsula.

This romantic region's- Granada's- most emblematic monument and one of the most visited in Spain is the walled city of Alhambra or "palace city" declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1984. 740 metres (2,430 ft) in length by 205 metres (670 ft) at its greatest width, it extends from west-northwest to east-southeast and covers an area of about 142,000 square metres (1,530,000 sq ft) or 35 acres. Alhambra castle complex occupies a small plateau on the south-eastern border of the with buildings may have existed before the arrival of the Moors. On January 2, 1492, Muhammad XII of Granada (King Boabdil) surrendered the Emirate of Granada, the city of Granada, and the Alhambra palace to the Castilian forces.





The Alhambra's architectural importance stems from the fact that it is a reflection of the culture of the last centuries of the Muslim rule of Al Andalus – the Andalusian region of Granada. Completed towards the end of Muslim rule of Spain by Muhammed V, Sultan of Granada (1353–1391). It is a place where artists and intellectuals had taken refuge. It is therefore a testament to Moorish culture in Spain and the skills of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian artisans, craftsmen, and builders of their era. It is said that Muhammad, the major builder of the complex, entered Granada in May 1238 dressed like a Sufi, in a plain wool cap, coarse clothes and sandals, took up residence in the Castle (Al-cazaba) built by the Zirids in the 11th century; then inspected an area known as Al-Hamra, where there was a small fortress, and laid the foundations there for his future residence and fortress.

Soon work began on defensive structures, an irrigation dam, and a dike. The construction would last into the reigns of his successors, and the complex would be known as the Alhambra and would become the residence of all Nasrid rulers up to the surrender of Granada in 1492. The necessary funds for the construction of Alhambra were collected as Tax and also used money sent by the Hafsid ruler of Tunis—intended for defence against the Christians.

First reference: The first reference to the Qal'at al-Hamra was during the battles between the Arabs and the Muladies (people of mixed Arab and European descent) during the rule of the 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad (r. 888–912). In one particularly fierce and bloody skirmish, the Muladies soundly defeated the Arabs, who were then forced to take shelter in a primitive red castle located in the province of Elvira, presently located in Granada. According to surviving documents from the era, the red castle was quite small,

and its walls were not capable of deterring an army intent on conquering. The castle was then largely ignored until the eleventh century, when its ruins were renovated and rebuilt by Samuel ibn Naghrela, vizier to the emir Badis ben Habus of the Zirid Dynasty of Al Andalus, in an attempt to preserve the small Jewish settlement also located on the natural plateau, Sabikah Hill.

This year, 1238, **Abdallah ibn al-Ahmar** climbed to the place called "the Alhambra" inspected it, laid out the foundations of a castle and left someone in charge of its construction. The design included plans for six palaces, five of which were grouped in the northeast quadrant forming a royal quarter, two circuit towers, and numerous bathhouses. During the reign of the Nasrid Dynasty, the Alhambra was transformed into a palatine city, complete with an irrigation system composed of acequias for the gardens of the Generalife located outside the fortress. Previously, the old Alhambra structure had been dependent upon rainwater collected from a cistern and from what could be brought up from the Albaicín. The creation of the Sultan's Canal solidified the identity of the Alhambra as a palace-city rather than a defensive and ascetic structure. The hydraulic system includes two long water channels and several sophisticated elevation devices to bring water onto the plateau.

Preceding to this early on in the 11th century the Castle of the Alhambra had been developed as a walled town which became a military stronghold that dominated the whole city but the royal residence was established by Muhammad marking the beginning of its halcyon days. The Alhambra became palace, citadel and fortress, and was the residence of the Nasrid sultans and their senior officials, including servants of the court and elite soldiers (13th–14th centuries). Islamic rule in the Iberian peninsula lasted for varying periods ranging from only 28 years in the extreme northwest (Galicia) to 781 years in the area surrounding the city of Granada in the southeast. This Empire added contributions to society such as libraries, schools, public bathrooms, literature, poetry, and architecture. This work was mainly developed through the unification of people of all faiths.



The Alhambra is an example of Muslim art in its final European stages, relatively uninfluenced by the direct Byzantine influences found in the Mezquita of Córdoba. In 1492 the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, expelled the final Moors from the city of Granada establishing a permanent residency in the Alhambra, and it was here that Christopher Columbus requested royal endorsement for his westward expedition that year. The Catholic Monarchs altered some rooms of the Alhambra after the conquest of the city in 1492, yet in 1527 Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor wanted to construct a permanent residence befitting an emperor and demolished parts of the architectural complex to build a Palace which bears his name, Charles V. Around 1537 he ordered the construction of the *Peinador de la Reina*, or Queen's dressing room, where his wife Isabel lived, over the Tower of Abu l-Hayyay.

TOPOGRAPHY: According to the site's current architect, Pedro Salmeron Escobar, the Alhambra evolved organically over a period of several centuries from the ancient hilltop fortress defined by a narrow promontory carved by the river Darro and overlooking the *Vega* or Plain of Granada as it descends from the Sierra Nevada. The red earth from which the fortress is constructed is a granular aggregate held together by a medium of red clay which gives the resulting layered brick- and stone-reinforced construction its characteristic hue and is at the root of the name of 'the Red Hill'

The palace and fortress complex located in was originally constructed as a small fortress in AD 889 on the remains of Roman fortifications, and then largely ignored until its ruins were renovated and rebuilt in the mid-13th century by the Nasrid emir Mohammed ben Al-Ahmar of the Granada, described above, who built its current palace and walls. It was converted into a royal palace in 1333 by Yusuf I, Sultan of Granada. After the conclusion of the Christian Reconquista in 1492, the site became the Royal Court of Ferdinand and Isabella (where Christopher Columbus received royal endorsement for his expedition), and the palaces were partially altered in the Renaissance style. In 1526 Charles I & V commissioned a new Renaissance palace better befitting the Holy Roman Emperor in the revolutionary Mannerist style influenced by humanist philosophy in direct juxtaposition with the Nasrid Andalusian architecture, but it was ultimately never completed due to Morisco rebellions in Granada.

Alhambra's last flowering of Islamic palaces was built for the last Muslim emirs in Spain during the decline of the Nasrid dynasty, who were increasingly subject to the Christian Kings of Castile. After being allowed to fall into disrepair for centuries, the buildings occupied by squatters, Alhambra was rediscovered following the defeat of Napoleon, who had conducted retaliatory destruction of the site. The rediscoverers were first British intellectuals and then other north European Romantic travelers. It is now one of Spain's major tourist attractions, exhibiting the country's most significant and well-known Islamic architecture, together with 16th-century and later Christian building and garden

interventions. The Alhambra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the inspiration for many songs and stories.

What the Moorish poets described as "a pearl set in emeralds", (an allusion to the red color of its buildings and the woods around them) was designed with the mountainous site in mind and many forms of technology were considered. The Moors planted -Alameda de la Alhambra-the park with roses and when overgrown it is covered with wildflowers and grass in the spring, and roses, oranges, and myrtles. Its most characteristic feature today, however, is the dense wood of English elms brought by the Duke of Wellington in 1812. The park has a multitude of nightingales and is usually filled with the sound of running water from several fountains and cascades. These are supplied through a conduit 8 km (5.0 mi) long, which is connected with the Darro at the monastery of Jesus del Valle above Granada.

Despite long neglect, willful vandalism, and some ill-judged restoration, the Alhambra endures as an atypical example of Islamic influenced architecture no matter that later Catholic rulers left their impressions on the architectural texture of the expansions of these grand dwellings. The Emirate of Granada which Muhammad founded, and the Nasrid royal house, lasted for two more centuries until it was annexed by Castile in 1492. His other legacy was the construction of the Alhambra, his residence in Granada. His successors would continue to build the palace and fortress complex and reside there, and it has lasted to the present day as the architectural legacy of the emirate.

Most of the palace buildings are quadrangular in plan, with all the rooms opening on to a central court, and the whole reached its present size simply by the gradual addition of new quadrangles, designed on the same principle, though varying in dimensions, and connected with each other by smaller rooms and passages. Alhambra was extended by the different Muslim rulers who lived in the complex. However, each new section that was added followed the consistent theme of "paradise on earth". Column arcades, fountains with running water, and reflecting pools were used to add to the aesthetic and functional complexity. In every case, the exterior was left plain and austere. Sun and wind were freely admitted. Blue, red, and a golden yellow, all somewhat faded through lapse of time and exposure, are the colors chiefly employed. The name Alhambra means the red one or the red castle, which refers to the sun-dried bricks that the outer wall is made of.

The decoration consists for the upper part of the walls, as a rule, of Arabic inscriptions—mostly poems by Ibn Zamrak and others praising the palace—that are manipulated into geometrical patterns with vegetal background set onto an arabesque setting ("Ataurique"). Much of this ornament is carved stucco (plaster) rather than stone. Tile mosaics ("alicatado"), with complicated mathematical patterns ("traceraía", most precisely "lacería"), are largely used as panelling for the lower part. Metal was also not present very mainly. Similar designs are displayed on wooden ceilings

(Alfarje). Muqarnas are the main elements for vaulting with stucco, and some of the most accomplished dome examples of this kind are in the Court of the Lions halls. The palace complex is designed in the Nasrid style, the last blooming of Islamic Art in the Iberian Peninsula, that had a great influence on the Maghreb to the present day, and on contemporary Mudejar Art, which is characteristic of western elements reinterpreted into Islamic forms and widely popular during the Reconquista in Spain.

Decorations: The decoration within the palaces comes from the last great period of Andalusian art in Granada. With little of the Byzantine influence of contemporary Abbasid architecture, artists endlessly reproduced the same forms and trends, creating a new style that developed over the course of the Nasrid Dynasty. The Nasrids used freely all the stylistic elements that had been created and developed during eight centuries of Muslim rule in the Peninsula, including the Caliphate horseshoe arch, the Almohad sebka (a grid of rhombuses), the Almoravid palm, and unique combinations of them, as well as innovations such as stilted arches and muqarnas (stalactite ceiling decorations). Structurally, the design is simple and does not evince significant innovation. While artistically pleasing it was until the reconquest structurally ad hoc and reliant on the skills of subject artisans and workers.

Columns and muqarnas appear in several chambers, and the interiors of numerous palaces are decorated with arabesques and calligraphy. The arabesques of the interior are ascribed to, among other sultans, Yusuf I, Mohammed V, and Ismail I, Sultan of Granada. However, after the Christian conquest of the city in 1492, the conquerors began to alter the Alhambra. The open work was filled up with whitewash, the painting and gilding effaced, and the furniture soiled, torn, or removed.^[3] Charles I (1516–1556) rebuilt portions in the Renaissance style of the period and destroyed the greater part of the winter palace to make room for a Renaissance-style structure which was never completed. Philip V (1700–1746) Italianized the rooms and completed his palace in the middle of what had been the Moorish building; he had partitions constructed which blocked up whole apartments.

This crude earthiness is counterpointed by the startling fine alabaster white stucco work of the famous interiors. Meltwater from the 'Snowy Mountains' is drawn across an arched vault at the eastern tip of the *Torre del Agua* ('Water Tower') and channeled through the citadel via a complex system of conduits (*acequia*) and water tanks (*los albercones*) which create the celebrated interplay of light, sound and surface.

Alhambra is about 740 meters (2,430 ft) in length by 205 meters (670 ft) at its greatest width. It extends from west-northwest to east-southeast and covers an area of about 142,000 square meters (1,530,000 sq. ft) or 35 acres. The Alhambra's most westerly feature is the Alcavala (citadel), a strongly fortified position built to protect the original post-Roman districts of *Iliberri*, now 'Centro', and *Gárnata al-yahūd* ('Granada of the Jews', now *Realejo*, and the Moorish suburb of *El Albayzín*.

Due to touristic demand, modern access runs contrary to the original sequence which began from a principal access via the *Puerta de la Justicia* (Gate of Justice) onto a large souk or public market square

facing the Alcazaba, now subdivided and obscured by later Christian-era development.^[8] From the *Puerta del Vino* (Wine Gate) ran the *Calle Real* (Royal Street) dividing the Alhambra along its axial spine into a southern residential quarter, with mosques, hammams (bathhouses) and diverse functional establishments, and a greater northern portion, occupied by several palaces of the nobility with extensive landscaped gardens commanding views over the Albayzin. All of this was subservient to the great Tower of the Ambassadors in the *Palacio Comares*, which acted as the royal audience chamber and throne room with its three arched windows dominating the city. The private, internalized universe of the *Palacio de Los Leones* (Palace of the Lions) adjoins the public spaces at right angles (see Plan illustration) but was originally connected only by the function of the Royal Baths, the Eye of Aixa's Room serving as the exquisitely decorated focus of meditation and authority overlooking the refined garden of *Lindaraja/Daraxa* toward the city.

The rest of the plateau comprises a number of earlier and later Moorish palaces, enclosed by a fortified wall, with thirteen defensive towers, some such as the *Torres de la Infanta* and *Cattiva* containing elaborate vertical palaces in miniature. The river Darro passes through a ravine on the north and divides the plateau from the Albaicín district of Granada. Similarly, the Assabica Valley, containing the Alhambra Park, lies on the west and south, and, beyond this valley, the almost parallel ridge of Monte Mauror separates it from the Antequeruela district. Another ravine separates it from the Generalife, the summer pleasure gardens of the emir. Escobar notes that the later planting of deciduous elms obscures the overall perception of the layout, so a better reading of the original landscape is given in winter when the trees are bare.

Main Structure: The Alhambra resembles many medieval Christian strongholds in its threefold arrangement as a castle, a palace and a residential annex for subordinates. The alcazaba or citadel, its oldest part, is built on the isolated and precipitous foreland which terminates the plateau on the northwest. All that remains are its massive outer walls, towers and ramparts. On its watchtower, the 25 m (85 ft) high *Torre de la Vela*, the flag of Ferdinand and Isabella was first raised as a symbol of the Spanish conquest of Granada on 2 January 1492.^[3] A turret containing a large bell was added in the 18th century and restored after being damaged by lightning in 1881. Beyond the Alcazaba is the palace of the Moorish rulers, The Nasrid Palaces or Alhambra proper, and beyond this is the Alhambra Alta (Upper Alhambra), originally occupied by officials and courtiers.

Access from the city to the Alhambra Park is afforded by the *Puerta de las Granadas* (Gate of Pomegranates), a triumphal arch dating from the 15th century. A steep ascent leads past the Pillar of Charles V, a fountain erected in 1554, to the main entrance of the Alhambra. This is the *Puerta de la Justicia* (Gate of Justice), a massive horseshoe archway surmounted by a square tower and used by the Moors as an informal court of justice. The hand of Fatima, with fingers outstretched as a talisman against the evil eye, is carved above this gate on the exterior; a key, the symbol of authority, occupies

the corresponding place on the interior. A narrow passage leads inward to the *Plaza de los Aljibes* (Place of the Cisterns), a broad open space which divides the Alcazaba from the Moorish palace. To the left of the passage rises the *Torre del Vino* (Wine Tower), built in 1345 and used in the 16th century as a cellar. On the right is the palace of Charles V, a smaller Renaissance building, to construct which part of the Alhambra, including the original main entrance, was torn down.

Jennat al Arif -Generalife- It is the outlying set of buildings connected to the Alhambra, of which the foremost is the Palacio de Generalife or Gíneralife (the Muslim *Jennat al Arif*, "Garden of Arif," or "Garden of the Architect"). This villa dates from the beginning of the 14th century but has been restored several times. The *Villa de los Martires* (Martyrs' Villa), on the summit of Monte Mauror, commemorates by its name the Christian slaves who were forced to build the Alhambra and confined here in subterranean cells.^[17] The *Torres Bermejas* (Vermilion Towers), also on Monte Mauror, are a well-preserved Moorish fortification, with underground cisterns, stables, and accommodation for a garrison of 200 men. Several Roman tombs were discovered in 1829 and 1857 at the base of Monte Mauror.



Pools in the Palacio de Generalife (*left*) and the Partal (*right*; in the *Alta Alhambra* of the complex)

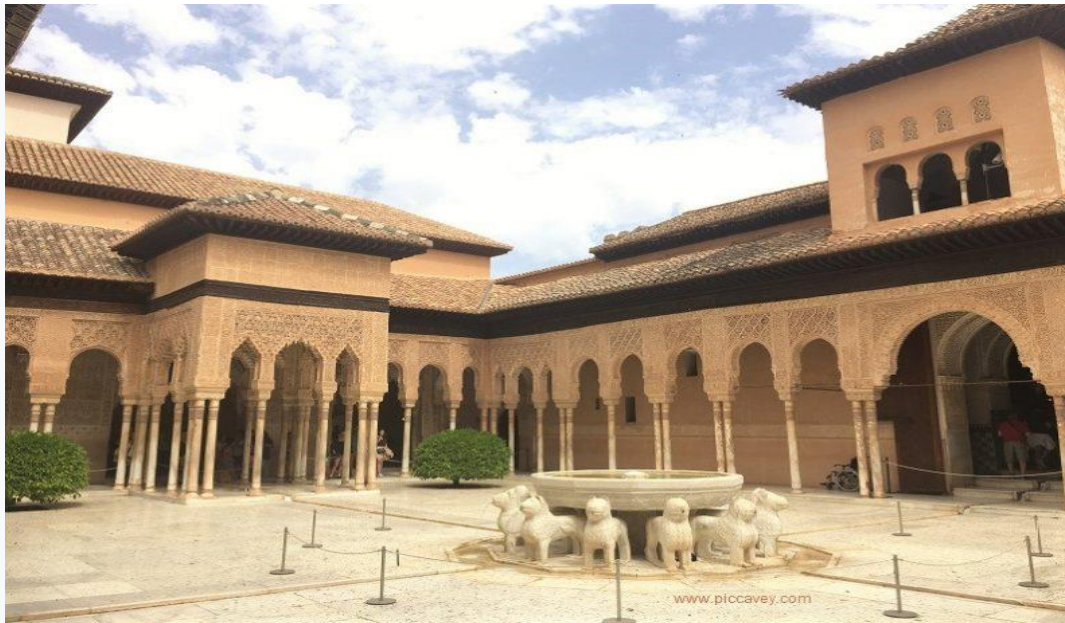
Plaza de Nazaríes Royal complex Courtyard of the Palace of Charles V is the second largest and important structure consisting of three main parts: Mexuar, Serallo, and the Harem. The Mexuar is modest in decor and houses the functional areas for conducting business and administration. Strapwork is used to decorate the surfaces in Mexuar. The ceilings, floors, and trim are made of dark wood and are in sharp contrast to white, plaster walls. Serallo, built during the reign of Yusuf I in the 14th century, contains the Patio de los Arrayanes (Court of the Myrtles). Brightly colored interiors featured *dado* panels, *yasería*, *azulejo*, cedar, and *artesonado*. Artesonado are highly decorative ceilings and other woodwork. Lastly, the Harem is also elaborately decorated and contains the living quarters for the wives and mistresses of the Arab monarchs. This area contains a bathroom with running water (cold and hot), baths, and pressurized water for showering. The bathrooms were open to the elements in order to allow in light and air.



the Patio de los Arrayanes - Court of the Myrtles The present entrance to the *Palacio Árabe* (Arab palace), or *Casa Real*, is by a small door from which a corridor connects to (Court of the Myrtles), also called the *Patio de la Alberca* (Court of the Blessing or Court of the Pond), from the Arabic *birka*, "pool". The Birke helped to cool the palace and acted as a symbol of power. Because water was usually in short supply, the technology required to keep these pools full was expensive and difficult. This court is 42 m (140 ft) long by 22 m (74 ft) broad, and in the center, there is a large pond set in the marble

pavement, full of goldfish, and with myrtles growing along its sides. There are galleries on the north and south sides; the southern gallery is 7 m (23 ft) high and supported by a marble colonnade. Underneath it, to the right, was the principal entrance, and over it are three windows with arches and miniature pillars. From this court, the walls of the *Torre de Comares* are seen rising over the roof to the north and reflected in the pond

The Patio de los Leones - The Court of the Lions, an example of Islamic Moorish architecture and garden design. or Courtyard of the Lions was built then. Now this is the most emblematic part of the Alhambra. It is an oblong courtyard, (35 m) in length by 66 ft (20 m) in width, surrounded by a low gallery supported on 124 white marble columns. A pavilion projects into the court at each extremity, with filigree walls and a light domed roof. The square is paved with colored tiles and the colonnade with white marble, while the walls are covered 5 ft (1.5 m) up from the ground with blue and yellow tiles, with a border above and below of enameled blue and gold. The columns supporting the roof and gallery are irregularly placed. They are adorned by varieties of foliage, etc.; about each arch there is a large square of stucco arabesques; and over the pillars is another stucco square of filigree work. It lies in the center of the court and is an alabaster basin supported by the figures of twelve lions in white marble, not designed with sculptural accuracy but as symbols of strength, power, and sovereignty. Each hour one lion would produce water from its mouth. At the edge of the great fountain there is a poem written by Ibn Zamrak. This praises the beauty of the fountain and the power of the lions, but it also describes their ingenious hydraulic systems and how they actually worked, which baffled all those who saw them. Around the 1360's is when the palace as we know today really begins to develop. This fountain is said to represent the heavenly garden of Islam. A large bowl sits on twelve lions; each one has its own individual markings and face. Underneath the base of Lion's fountain run four water channels. These streams symbolize the four rivers of paradise. Each of the twelve lions spout water into channels below which run across the marble courtyard, creating movement and sounds across the centre of the palace. **The Hall of the Two Sisters** is adjoining room to the Court. Decorated poems specifically for the space had been inscribed on the walls-probably by the court poet Ibn Zamrak, (1333-1393). with verse wrapped around the impressive walls. This room off the Courtyard of the Lions has two huge marble flagstones on the floor. They have the same dimensions on either side of the entrance. This white stone is from the town of Macael in Almeria. I'm sure that it was quite an ordeal moving these huge flagstones almost 200 kilometres in those days. The ceiling in this room is breath-taking. Inside the white plasterwork creates a dramatic effect. These shapes are *muqarnas* or a three-dimensional decoration of Islamic architecture initially built to be structural in purpose made out of stone, but here they became crafted decoration to decorate the area between the wall and the dome.



Sala de los Abencerrajes -The Hall of the Abencerrages is so named from a legend according to which the father of Boabdil, the last sultan of Granada, having invited the chiefs of that line to a banquet, massacred them there. This room is a perfect square, with a lofty dome and trellised windows at its base. The roof is decorated in blue, brown, red and gold, and the columns supporting it spring out into the arch form in a remarkably beautiful manner. Opposite to this hall is the *Sala de las dos Hermanas* (Hall of the two Sisters), so-called from two white marble slabs laid as part of the pavement. These slabs measure 500 by 220 cm (15 by 7½ ft). There is a fountain in the middle of this hall, and the roof — a dome honeycombed with tiny cells, all different, and said to number 5000 — is an example of the "stalactite vaulting" of the Moors.



"Honeycomb," "stalactite," or "moqárabe" vaulting in the Hall of the Abencerrajes

Athath almanzil-Furniture: The famous Alhambra vases, very large Hispano-Moresque ware vases made in the Sultanate are the original furniture of the palace. These famous examples of Hispano-Moresque ware date from the 14th and 15th centuries. The one remaining in the palace, from about 1400, is 1.3 m (4 ft 3 in) high; the background is white and the decoration is blue, white and gold.



Nasrid shell vase in the Alhambra

Mathematics in Design: Water and geometry are the main design elements in the Alhambra

The maze-like corridors of the palace, have many walls covered in brightly coloured ceramic tiles. The tiles cover half of the walls. The Alhambra tiles are remarkable in that they contain nearly all, if not all, of the seventeen mathematically possible wallpaper groups. This is a unique accomplishment in world architecture. M. C. Escher's visit in 1922 and study of the Moorish use of symmetries in the Alhambra tiles inspired his subsequent work on tessellation, which he called "regular divisions of the plane" As

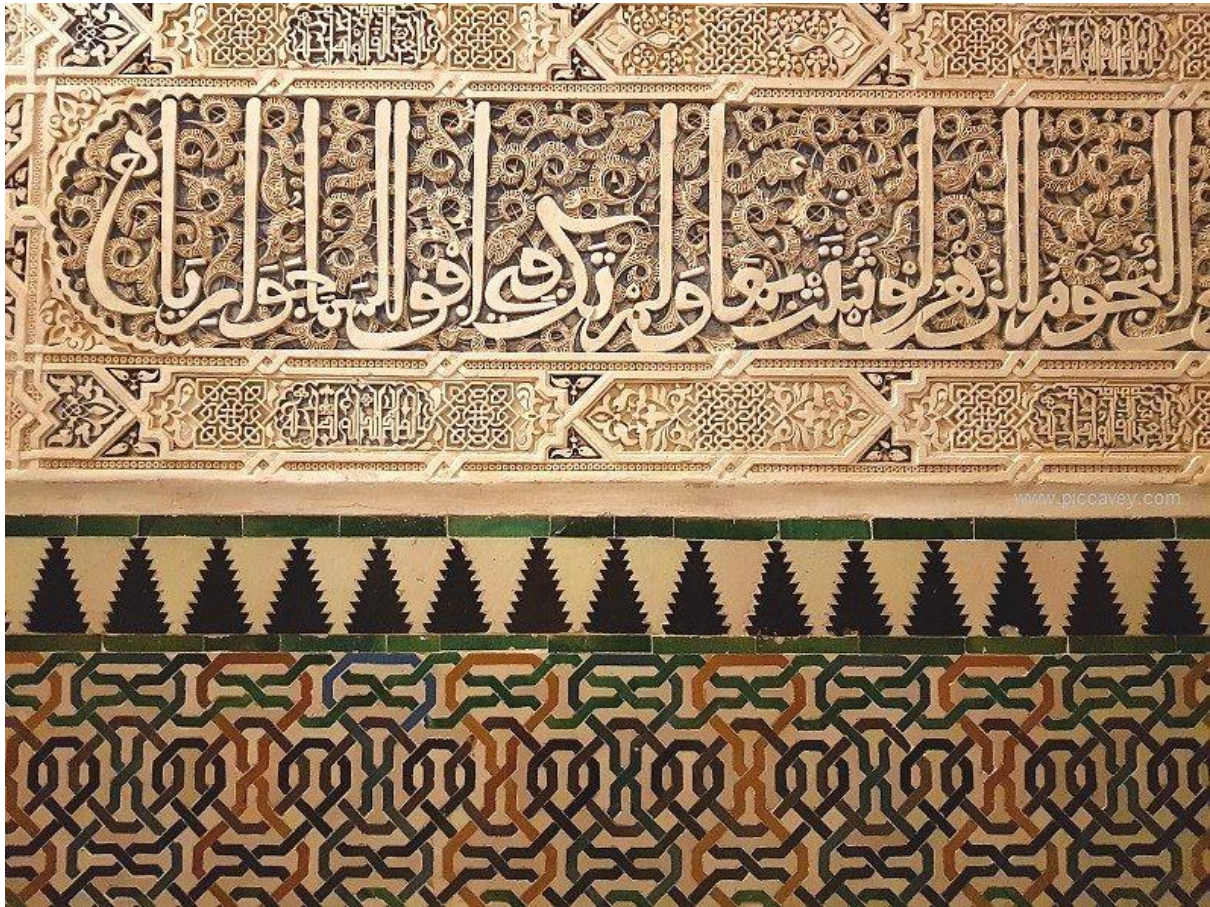
this historic period is of great importance, we can still see coloured tiles across Andalusia today. These tiles apart from being decorative, keep walls cooler in summertime and protect them too. Tiling done with mathematical precision was intended to be aesthetically pleasing. Geometrical calculations were used in the tile patterns creating an infinite design to cover as much distance as needed for each space.



1. All those centuries ago the colours of the tiles were created with these materials:
2. Blue – Cobalt
3. Purple or Black -Manganese
4. Green – Iron
5. Red or Green- Copper
6. White – Tin
7. Yellow – Lead or Antimony

Above the tiles, higher up towards the walls geometrical shapes or poetic inscriptions abound. Towards the top of the walls quotations from the Koran appear, intentionally situated far from the ground.

The Salón de los Embajadores - The design of this throne room is based on many square shapes. Consequently, Mathematicians and architects appreciate this room due to its symmetry and precision. The room is said to have had brightly coloured rugs, beautiful vases and musical instruments around in earlier times. It occupies all the *Torre de Comares*. It is a square room, the sides being 12 m (37 ft) in length, while the center of the dome is 23 m (75 ft) high. This was the grand reception room, and the throne of the sultan was placed opposite the entrance. The grand hall projects from the walls of the palace, providing views in three directions. In this sense, it was a "mirador"- a turret or tower attached to a building and providing an extensive view from which the palace's inhabitants could gaze outward to the surrounding landscape. The tiles are nearly 4 ft (1.2 m) high all round, and the colors vary at intervals. Over them is a series of oval medallions with inscriptions, interwoven with flowers and leaves. There are nine windows, three on each facade, and the ceiling is decorated with white, blue and gold inlays in the shape of circles, crowns and stars. The walls are covered with varied stucco works, surrounding many ancient escutcheons.



Inscriptions: Some inscriptions are beautiful poetry whereas others provide information on construction dates of building within the Alhambra.

Even more inscriptions cover phrases such as “*There is no victor but Allah*” which appears many times. Also recurring words like “happiness” or “blessing” appear often throughout the palace. These words are there to protect the monarch honoured in each courtyard.

Similarly, other phrases appear such as: “*Rejoice in good fortune, because Allah helps you*” or “*Be sparse in words and you will go in peace.*” It seems like the men choosing these texts for the palace walls were poets but also politicians. This wall decoration was an elaborate form of political propaganda. These palace officials reflected the authority and power of the Sultan. Visible to anyone entering the rooms at the heart of the Al Andalus kingdom. Abundant inscriptions were added year by year. Such as the one in the Throne room:

*“From me you are welcomed morning and evening
by the tongues of blessing, prosperity, happiness and friendship”
“has decorated me with the robes of his glory and excellence
without disguise and has made me the throne of his empire
may its eminence be upheld by the master of divine glory and the celestial throne”*

Starry Ceilings: The intricate cedar wood ceiling has exacting measurements. Extremely difficult to put into place it consists of 8017 multicoloured panels. Symbolizing the seven heavens of Islamic Paradise. Diagonal lines radiate from the centre representing the four trees of life. The ceiling is decorated with lots of stars. Painted to shine like ivory, mother of pearl and silver. Also, worth noticing is the difference between the 8 pointed and 16 pointed stars. Most of the room would have been in a dim light, ensuring cooler temperatures. the latticework on the windows allows filtered light into the room. The effect of the light from the windows shone around the throne. This would surround the sultan in diffused light in a dim room creating a position of power and mystery. The throne would be set upon something to give it height too.

Last word: The Alhambra is the best example of Islam architecture in Europe. It took many months and years of work to decorate the palace interiors. One of the inscribed poems best describes this architectural feat:

*The portico is so beautiful that the palace
competes in beauty with the sky.
You dressed it with such an exquisite lamé,
that the loom of the Yemen is forgotten.
;How many arches are high on its summit,
on the columns that are adorned by the light,
like spheres that turn
above the glowing pillar of the dawn!
The columns are so beautiful in every way,
that their success flies from mouth to ear:
the marble throws its clear light, which invades
the black corner that blackens the shadow;
its highlights iridesce, and one would say that
they are, in spite of their size, pearls.*
